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Jerry Sadowitz show axed over 'extreme racism, sexism, homophobia and misogyny'

Daniel Sanderson - Sunday

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A leading comedian who had his show at the Edinburgh Fringe cancelled due to "extreme" content was warned by organisers that his performance may have constituted a hate crime.

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Jerry Sadowitz has spoken out about the controversy - Supplied

The treatment of Jerry Sadowitz, a veteran on the comedy circuit widely known for the controversial content of his shows, has provoked a freedom of speech row at this year's festival after his show was axed after just one performance.

The Pleasance, the venue which cancelled the 60-year-old's show after members of the audience and staff complained, said

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on Sunday night that the content had been “extreme in its racism, sexism, homophobia and misogyny” and defended its decision.

It argued that the “boundaries” were “always moving” and that some audience members had been made to feel “unsafe” by Sadowitz’s “completely unacceptable” actions.

However, leading comedians have come to his defence, claiming his on-stage persona is well-established and that his “complex and clever” comedy was designed to be “challenging” to audiences.

The Telegraph understands that in an email to Sadowitz, informing him that his two-night run was to be cancelled after the first performance, he was warned that the Pleasance, the venue that hosted the show, believed he may have committed a criminal act.

The Scottish-American comic was told that his show was "racially abhorrent and potentially considered unlawful as a hate crime", it is believed.

A new SNP law designed to clamp down on hate crime was passed at Holyrood last year, despite comedians including Rowan Atkinson raising fears that it would have a chilling impact on freedom of expression.

While Sadowitz is said to have exposed himself on stage at his show, this is not believed to be the reason for the cancellation.

Instead, the venue said it would not associate with content “which attacks people’s dignity” and said language which he used was "completely unacceptable".

He is believed to have used a racial slur when discussing Rishi Sunak and also made derogatory remarks about women.

“Due to numerous complaints, we became immediately aware of content that was considered, among other things, extreme in its racism, sexism, homophobia and misogyny” the Pleasance said in a statement.

“A large number of people walked out of Jerry Sadowitz’s show as they felt uncomfortable and unsafe to remain in the venue. We have received an unprecedented number of complaints that could not be ignored and we had a duty to respond.”

It added: “In a changing world, stories and language that were once accepted on stage, whether performed in character or not, need to be challenged. There is a line that we will not cross at the Pleasance, and it was our view that this line was crossed on this occasion.”

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The venue's initial listing for the show stated that it would contain "strong language and themes some may find distressing."

Addressing the controversy, Sadowitz wrote on Twitter on Sunday night he left the show with "no hint of anything going wrong".

"My act is now being cheapened and simplified as unsafe, homophobic, misogynistic and racist," he said.

"I ask nobody to agree with anything I say or do on stage. The show is what it is, for those who enjoy it. The rest of you... please stick to Carry On films."

Earlier on Saturday he said: "Did a show last night, 75 mins, thought it went well. Didn't see any walkouts.

"Today I'm told my show's been cancelled. Great stuff. I'm truly sorry for everyone who travelled to see the show tonight."

> Did a show last night, 75 mins, thought it went well. Didn't see any walkouts. Today I'm told my show's been cancelled. Great stuff. I'm truly sorry for everyone who travelled to see the show tonight.
>
> — Jerry Sadowitz (@RealJSadowitz) August 13, 2022

Supporters of Sadowitz said that the venue should not have booked him in the first place if it did not want controversial views to be expressed on stage, with his aggressive brand of comedy well-established.

Richard Herring, the English stand-up, described the cancellation of the show as a "very worrying development".

He added: "Jerry is a challenging comedian but that's the whole point of his act. The Fringe should not be cancelling shows in any case."

Meanwhile, Al Murray said he was "furious" while Simon Evans, who regularly appears on the BBC, offered to repeat whatever Sarowitz said that led to his cancellation in his own Fringe show.

"I think every other comic should too," Mr Evans added. "This is our Spartacus moment."

Police said that they had not received any complaints.

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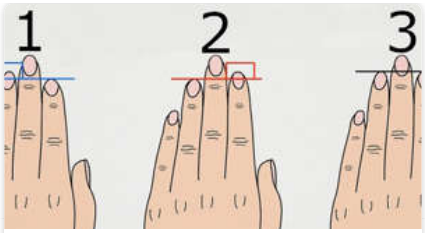

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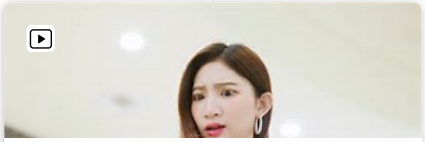

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